

**MADERA WATER BANK OPPOSED**  
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Board says no thanks to water bank

By Charles McCarthy  
The Fresno Bee

MADERA - Madera County supervisors are talking tough against a proposed 13,600-acre underground water bank that critics warn would suck up local water and send it to Southern California.

Supervisors directed County Counsel Jeff Kuhn on Tuesday to strengthen a resolution against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's planned project after hearing another wave of complaints from farmers.

"Just say that we are opposed to it and we want it stopped," Supervisor Gail Hanhart McIntyre told Kuhn.

The proposed water bank would be located under Madera Ranch, about eight miles west of the city.

It would be about three-quarters the size of Millerton Lake and serve the same purpose as an above-ground reservoir - storing water for public use. This bank would store as much as 390,000 acre-feet of water, with each acre-foot containing 326,000 gallons of water.

Groundwater banks are popular in some government and environmental circles because they are less expensive to build than reservoirs and considered relatively nature-friendly.

But this project's influential backers - the Bureau of Reclamation, Calfed and the Trust for Public Lands - face a struggle in Madera County.

On Oct. 21, the Madera City Council is expected to vote on its own opposition to the project. Other opponents include the county Farm Bureau, Madera Irrigation District, Friant Water Users Authority and the Chowchilla Water District.

Farmers have warned officials that the water bank could reduce and taint the area's clean drinking-water supply. They worry that crops would be threatened if the underground water bank rises or falls too much.

Kuhn's resolution noted that the Bureau of Reclamation has not addressed concerns that some water experts have identified.

"It appears the project is more likely to worsen than improve the water overdraft conditions in Madera County and the surrounding area," the resolution says.

Chester Andrew and three other growers said the water bank is a scheme to guarantee water to Southern California interests at the county's expense. "This project just seems to have tentacles," he said. "There's a mad scramble in Southern California for water, and we're it."